

The final hours of the climate talks in Copenhagen

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Global Research, December 19, 2009

19 December 2009

Theme: [Environment](#)

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There is so much excitement in Copenhagen! All day on Friday 18th there was expectation of a conclusion and an agreement, if only a vapid political agreement. And this would be a vapid political agreement born in the offices of the Danish government and rejected by sticklers of protocol who insist that the United Nations rules of consensus be followed. Let us back up a minute. Some readers who have been following the formal negotiations during last week will remember that the Danish government tried to insert its own political statement (not the formal, official proposed text of a legally binding new emissions control agreement to take effect from 2013) but was roundly foiled in this attempt by all parties crying foul. This very rejected move was then tried again on Friday 18th about mid day. With the big hitters like Obama and Clinton at the Bella Centre, putting pressure on all delegates for an agreement of some sort at least to save face, the Danish government came forward again with its own draft, allegedly crafted with some input from other governments. This vapid political statement that said very little was accepted to the disappointment of many by the African Union. (Where is the leadership of Nigeria here?) However, Sudan held out. The Sudanese representative made himself very unpopular with the European delegates who heaped scorn on him when the Sudanese delegate explained his country's refusal to support the empty document on the grounds that it would impose a sentence of genocide on the peoples of Africa and indeed of the world. As European diplomats remonstrated with him for the use of the word genocide, he stuck to his guns. He was violently denounced as an extremist in the formal sessions and in the hallways of the Bella Centre according to my inside source, corroborated by direct links to the inside webcast.

Then China, Brazil, the European Union, the USA and its lapdog Canada backed the Danish verbiage. The only hold out was ALBA (Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Honduras and some Caribbean island countries). Their objection was that the draft from the Danish government was empty, and like Sudan's representative declared, it was too close to complicity in genocide.

The big star in this ALBA holdout was Angelica Navarro, the 30 something year old head of the Bolivian delegation. Most impressively she withstood the grinding exhaustion that afflicts especially the older delegates and continued with sterling logic, numbers and morality to resist the pressure from almost all corners of the world to affirm the ALBA refusal. She has led a remarkable Bolivian stance that is also the ALBA stance that consensus must be followed with respect to the climate talks, including for the introduction and passing of any agreement, political or legally binding alike. She has led the fight for the recognition of the rights of nature, themselves enshrined in the Bolivian constitution, and if she had her way, to be inscribed in international law with prosecution and sanctioning arrangements.

The last 48 hours have not been without humor inside the grim premises of the official talks. At 6 am on Saturday 19 December the African delegates began to plead when they got the floor that their flight arrangements required a deal now, that their planes were departing by 8 a.m. and the like. Several journalists faced absolute exhaustion so in the early hours of Saturday the 19th began to file their stories that featured a cave in of ALBA and the ratification of the empty political statement. Of course this caught the journalists with inaccurate reports because ALBA, as of 9:30 am on Sat. had not caved.

Obama left the Bella Centre at about 9:30 pm Friday the 18th amidst great security displays of sirens and a massive vehicle convoy passing directly under the balcony of the apartment I am staying in, where the residents stayed away from the windows in fear of the tight security and the possibility that the least pretext might trigger repression from the edgy, jumpy security guards, police, military, plain clothes cops and the like that are everywhere trying to prove their importance and the legitimacy of their technical toys of violence that hang from their armored bodies. No one has anything good to say about Obama here in Copenhagen. South Africa's bishop Tutu said 'Obama has been given the Nobel prize for peace. He is a Nobel laureate. Let him become what he is.'

At the peoples' assembly in the Klimaforum a panel of speakers roundly condemned the vacuous speech given by Obama as having no insight, no perspective, nothing to offer the world as we burn. In fact the continued presentation of simple minded rhetoric by Obama along with other industrialized countries' leaders, amongst whom Canada's Stephen Harper is the most embarrassing, (as Naomi Kline indicated in her excellent critique of the official talks on Friday afternoon at the Klimaforum) has been a strong incentive for representatives of small and obscure countries like Bolivia and Sudan to come forward and fill the leadership gap.

Of great importance in any appreciation of the deadlock inside the Bella Centre is the issue of money. Some thirty billion dollars for the first three years and then 100 billion dollars per year as of 2020 and thereafter) have been committed by the USA and other countries for mitigation (on terms similar to those required by the World Bank, that is, more structural adjustment and more neoliberal enclosures for private profit and the extension of corporate rule while capitalist relations collapse all round). But no money can be disbursed unless there is some kind of political statement agreed and issued. One can imagine the concern of the many thousands of corporate lobbyists and hacks working for fake environmental ngos that are business associations for the capitalists keen to profit from this largess. They see the money hanging in front of their eyes but they cant put their hands on it, all because of ALBA. Their potential partners, the deal makers of the third world governments are also, selectively salivating at the prospects of personal and political gain from accessing this money. But for now the male dealers both third world and corporate are on ice. But with no agreement there is no disbursement of money. A certain kind of panic is taking hold of those parties who are duty bound to bring home the bacon (apologies to vegetarians all).

At Klimaforum in the evening the Danish civil society organizations who had been central to the mounting of a terrific peoples assembly during the two weeks of activities of a very high level of quality and creativity handed over the torch (a big bundle of files and papers in fact) to the Latin American friends in attendance who will organize for the next six months to one year when a follow up climate conference will be held in some Mexican city.

I am getting on the train, meeting Wahu Kaara from Kenya, interviewing her for Canadian Dimension and the journal Capitalism Nature Socialism, going with her to the airport to see

that she gets off OK, and then returning to the centre of this sensationally beautiful old city, and going to the national museum and probably back to the peoples' internal community of Christiania where I am sure to find some delicious vegetarian food and people to talk culture and politics with.

As the events here come to an end, very much in my mind is the superb contribution of women and third world peoples' along with indigenous peoples to these climate talks. The greatest victories cluster around the demand to shut down the tar sands, and more widely to stop all fossil fuel production. Keep the oil under the soil, keep the coal in the hole, keep the tarsand under the land -as Oilwatch demands. This demand, obscure and on the margins for the period since it was put forward by Ecuador civil society in Kyoto in 1997 is not the front line demand. This escalation of the importance of stopping emissions at source is one of the most remarkable evolutions I have witnessed in many decades of political work on the international scene. Direct, coordinated, global action against the major polluters both at the point of production and at the point of consumption, is as George Monbiot and Naomi Kline amongst a host of others including me have advocated here in Copenhagen, is in fact the policy of many environmental ngos, social movements, and increasingly, governments. Forward to Mexico and a peoples enforceable climate agreement that really punishes the perpetrators and brings them down in order to cool the world. System change not climate change.

A final confirmation - there is no new news from the formal talks. There is nothing happening. The webcast has been closed off. It is 10 am on Saturday 19 Dec.

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